

AN APPOINTMENT

By Catharine Young Glen

THE GRAMERCY,
GRAMERCY PARK.

MY DEAR MR. BLUNT:

It was impossible for me to meet you yesterday. I am very sorry! Will leave all explanations till I see you.

Sincerely yours,

CECILIA VAIL.

November the nineteenth.

Blunt sat at his desk in the office on Nassau street, that morning, with the dainty missive, just opened, in his hand. If he bore the marks of having passed a sleepless night, it was not from dissipation. The cause was, briefly, this: He had had an engagement to dine, on the previous evening, with the young lady whose name was signed to the note, and, by one of those unaccountable tricks of which the mind is sometimes guilty, had forgotten it.

Nothing, in years, had so disturbed him. A hundred times, if once, had he reviewed the matter, striving both to get the clue to his inexplicable blunder and, most naturally, to find for it a possible excuse. His memory, now unnecessarily active, was able to call up a wealth of detail. It was just ten days ago when he made the appointment, as he sat with Miss Vail in the little parlor in Gramercy Park. He could remember, to the shadows the lamp cast upon it, the dress she wore and, still more accurately, the changes of her pretty face. He remembered—that he could forget anything with which she was connected!—her very words, and his.

They had been speaking of a certain restaurant on the East Side, much visited by the novelty-seeker. Miss

Vail had never been there, and they were both young enough to be enthusiastic over such things. He had offered to take her at his first opportunity, which had happened to be the evening in question, and they were to meet at the Fifth Avenue Hotel, at six, the place most convenient for her as she came from a previous engagement.

This, their intended sally into bohemia, had been down in his mental calendar ever since as one of the bright spots ahead. When he now asked himself what could have driven it from his mind, he had nothing to set over against the question but a blank. Was it the awful rush of yesterday? the fact that he had bungled that important errand in the morning? that he had been bothered with that Fraternity matter in the afternoon? Of one thing only he was certain—that the fact remained. He had eaten his dinner at the usual place and in the usual solitary way, without an inkling of the little tragedy in which, by so doing, he was playing the leading part.

Through the long night hours that elapsed between the moment when his sin of omission first dawned on him and daylight, he had tortured himself with conjectures as to what her attitude might now be toward him, and with conflicting resolves. His regard for truth and his desire to keep, if possible, her good opinion warred within him. What should he do? Action of some kind was a necessity. Invent an excuse? Tell a falsehood? A dozen eagerly suggested themselves. He might have been de-

tained, unable to send word, taken suddenly ill. She would never know, in all probability, and would continue to respect him as before. But he? The shuttlecock came back again. He would know, and what about respecting himself?

Own up to it? Tell her just how it was? She was high-strung and sensitive, as he knew her, dear little thing! "An awful rush of business," "worry," "unexpected matters coming up." It sounded all very well as he said it—but to her ears? Blunt turned over and punched his pillow to a shapeless heap. With a woman it is fatal to forget!

The morning, however, had brought determination and an aching head. There was no way out like the right way. He would tell the truth. He had taken his place in the office with the explanation and plea, which he intended writing and sending to her, already half-framed. And now, after all his fevered tossings and the bitter, if virtuous, solution wrung from the problem, had come this letter.

"It was impossible for me to meet you yesterday." She herself was not there! Pushing away the papers from before him, despite the fact that the other clerks were bending busily above their desks, he tilted back his chair. "Luck?" screamed one of the voices suddenly beating about his ears. "Was there ever such a piece of luck?"

He read and re-read the little letter, holding it with hands that were not quite steady; then, crushing it back into the envelope, tossed it from him and returned to work with a frowning brow. His gray eyes were obstinate and his jaw was set. But the deeds and mortgages on which he strove to concentrate attention were written over with the wording of the note. His head began to throb again, persistently, and the glare from the skylight made everything seem blurred.

Miss Vail stood alone at one of the windows overlooking Gramercy Park. Behind her the noon sun rev-

eled in a mass of chrysanthemums in a vase on the mantel-shelf, played with a paper-cutter on the table and made a quivering oblong on the floor. Before her the trees spread out their maze of branches, each twig bare and motionless. She held the tassel of the curtain in her hand, twirling it idly. Her eyes, sweet and serious, gazed down into the square.

There was a rap on the door and she started, having been too much occupied with her thoughts to hear the footstep. To her, "Come in!" a servant entered, one of the maids employed about the house, with an envelope in her hand. "A note, miss," the maid explained, "and the boy is waiting down-stairs in the hall. I told him I would bring it up, as I was coming. There is to be an answer, he says."

The girl went forward and took the letter, glancing quickly at the address. She folded it, drawing it back and forth between her fingers, a faint color showing on her cheek.

"There is to be an answer," she repeated, "and the boy is waiting? Very well, Mary; I am much obliged. You are going back again, you say? Would you mind telling him that I will see him?" She seated herself beside the table. "The answer will be ready in a minute. I will take it down."

The maid nodded and went out, closing the door behind her, and after she had gone the girl sat with elbow on the table and chin on her palm, the letter, unopened, in her lap. She was glad to be alone; her breath was wont to come a little quickly, of late, at sight of that familiar writing. She had never known, perhaps, how much it did mean to her—until just now. A curious expression, as though it might have been unwillingness, played upon her face. She lifted the envelope, tapping it; then, with a sudden resolute motion, caught up the paper-cutter, and with a slip of its edge the boldly written sheet was in her hands.

90 NASSAU STREET.

MY DEAR MISS VAIL:

Do I need say that I was disappointed

not to see you? But spare yourself those explanations. Your word that it was impossible is enough.

I have fixed a penalty, however. Meet me to-day at the same hour and place. Please say "yes" by the messenger. You can't refuse. As always,

Yours,
SYLVESTER BLUNT.

The patch of sun on the floor crept forward; a clock above the mantel ticked loudly on. The little figure still leaned on the table. She seemed to have forgotten that the boy waited below.

There was a sudden rustle of her gown, the quick scrape of a chair, as she took her place before the desk. She tried the point of a gold pen and pulled toward her a sheet of paper, stamped with a dainty monogram, bending above it while the sun paled and a few flakes of the first snow whirled, unheeded, by the window. The chrysanthemums, looking over her shoulder, read:

THE GRAMERCY,
GRAMERCY PARK.

DEAR MR. BLUNT:

Your note is just received. I shall indeed

spare myself, and you, all further explanations. I waited for you at the Fifth Avenue, yesterday, from six until after seven.

I am sorry, but until I can place the same reliance on *your* word——

She stopped, struck by something in the unfinished sentence. Could she finish it, indeed! His word? If he, perhaps, had not placed quite so much reliance on her own! She laid down the pen and looked hard ahead of her. It was the first time that she had seen the matter from his side.

Pulled by her ruthless fingers, petal after petal of the flower that leaned down farthest dropped on the blotter. She was about to sit in judgment on him for the truth. Was there no apology, in that same light, which he might demand of her? She pushed the falling petals into patterns. She had weighed him in the balance and he had been found wanting—but could she cast it up to him?

She tore up the sheet on which she had written, and took another.

"Come up to-night, instead," she wrote in answer to his letter, "and we will have a talk."

